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FUTURESCAN 4: VALUING PRACTICE

Hand crafted textile products accompanied by a short 10m documentary film 'Stitching Stories'

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Abstract

Addressing Integrating and Connecting Digital Technologies:

The exhibition is a collection of three hand stitched textile products with an accompanying short documentary style film. The film supports the products by demonstrating the design process in which the textiles were made. The textile pieces are described as modern-day family heirlooms. Both pieces of work - the film and heirloom pieces address the integration and connection of digital technologies as well as valuing artisan skills, drawing and making. The handcrafted heirlooms have been designed and crafted by Shirley Mclauchlan from the University of Edinburgh, School of Design, Textiles. Her design work focuses on her role as a practicing, sustainable designer. The process has been filmed by Maddie Clark a final year BA (Hons) Broadcasting student from University of the West of Scotland. The collaboration has recorded hand skills that may be in danger of being lost as the impact of digital technologies speed up the making process. The film documents the process and further examines the relationship between the designer and the client. The design work demonstrates how skill and material choice can help to maximise the longevity of a product. The work explores the notion of modern-day family heirlooms. An heirloom is defined as something passed down in a family for generations.

Keywords: sustainability; hand stitching; heirloom; craft; unique

Introduction

The exhibits presented at the *Futurescan 4: Valuing Practice* exhibition, University of Bolton, 23rd-24th January 2019 comprised hand crafted textile products, accompanied by a short 10-minute documentary film, "Stitching Stories" (McLauchlan and Clark 2018). The exhibit addressed two of the key themes of the *Futurescan 4: Valuing Practice* conference - Valuing Artisan Skills, Drawing and Making; Integrating and Connecting Digital Technologies.

Overview of the Exhibits

The exhibit comprises of a collection of three pieces that value hand skills and making in relation to design practice as a sustainable designer, within a commercial context. To accompany the work a short documentary film was included. The film was a collaboration between the lecturer, researcher and designer, Shirley Mclauchlan, University of Edinburgh and final year B.A. (Hons) Broadcasting student, Maddie Clark, University of the West of Scotland. The film documents the career of Mclauchlan and evidences her craft and hand stitching skills as a commercial sustainable designer. The film also explores the relationship between the designer and the client. Co-creation as a design concept is put into practice. The film documents Mclauchlan's design practice highlighting the importance of the relationship between client and designer. Shirley Mclauchlan studied Textiles at The

Glasgow School of Art and St Martins London. She was a partner in the successful print studio Kim Clark Design in London designing collections and selling prints internationally for over twelve years.

In 1997 she set up her own practice designing 'Modern Family Heirlooms' (for further information see: www.shirleymclauchlan.co.uk). Her design philosophy is embedded in sustainability. She strives to work as a commercial, sustainable designer making pieces that are valued and 'tell a story'. Her research at ECA has resulted in presenting academic papers at the multi-disciplinary *Product Lifetimes And The Environment* (PLATE 2019) conference facilitating workshops and exhibitions which question the role of design and the environment.

Mclauchlan works to commission. Therefore, she has no excess stock. Each design piece is made for a particular client. The relationship between Mclauchlan and her client is maximised with design decisions being made collaboratively throughout the development of the design process. The film and textile samples presented in the exhibition celebrate hand skills in relation to the life of a commercial textile designer. Filmed over the summer of 2018, Clark captured the essence of the unique design practice of Mclauchlan. The documentary and design piece both explore the value of artisan skills and integrate hand and digital technologies.

Co -creation as method is investigated by Mclauchlan. She builds up a relationship with each client. The process develops as the work progresses. At various stages of the design process Mclauchlan offers possible features to be included or excluded / colour palates are decided. The client is shown a series of sketches via email. This is followed up with a conversation and decisions made. While the designer is very in control the client's involvement is evident throughout the commission. The client is very much part of the decision making. The documentation of this correspondence lends itself to a co -creation method of designing. The client is very much part of the decision making so the connection with the piece is greater with the client being more personally involved the creation of the piece.

Blanket for 'Felix'

Figure 1 shows a blanket commissioned by the parents of Felix Iggo. The blanket was initially used practically as a bed blanket and later as an art piece. It was designed to celebrate the birth of Felix. Significant dates and important family names were added to create memories; cowboys, a favourite of the user, were added to the design to further personalise the piece. The blanket has now been stored away. It is the family's hope that it will in time be given to future family members. When the time is right, Mclauchlan will add any new family details to this blanket. Due to the embroidered content, the blanket acts as a potentially evolving heirloom for the Iggo and Maclean families.

Blanket for Felix Iggo (son of a client) was designed and hand stitched over a course of 7month period. Including many conversations on the content of the blanket further emails were exchanged to include accurate family names and specific dates. Actual time stitching is estimated at 350 hours. Materials used are 100% Ayrshire wool blanket, 100% cotton embroidery threads, cotton backing.



Figure 1: A Modern-Day Heirloom - Blanket for 'Felix', Shirley Mclauchlan, 2003.
On loan courtesy of Sheela Maclean.

Table runner for 'Kitty'

Figure 2 shows a detail of an embroidered table runner. This piece was designed for the twenty-first birthday of Kitty Mclauchlan (Mclauchlan's daughter). It was made to celebrate her life so far and includes personal text that signifies the love of her parents, countries that she has visited and favourite sayings. This personally connected embroidered content adds to the individuality of this piece. It is hoped that the user will take this piece with her wherever she goes and more personal details will be added to it as her life continues. This personalised runner will act as an heirloom piece and in the future will be passed on to the next generation.

With the '21st Runner' for Kitty Mclauchlan, design work started in October 2017 with the runner being given to Kitty on her twenty-first Birthday in March 2018. Family names and important dates were added to the runner. The runner will be updated and more details added as Kitty's life progresses. Actual stitching time is approximately 252 hours (4-5 months). Materials used are 100% French linen, 100% cotton embroidery threads.



Figure 2: A Modern-Day Heirloom - Table runner for 'Kitty', Shirley Mclauchlan, 2018.
On loan courtesy of Kitty Mclauchlan.

Personalised Collection for *The Cross*

Figure 3 shows a detail of embroidered cushions. This collection was designed in collaboration with *The Cross*, an upmarket boutique in London. The collection is a limited edition that celebrates hand stitching and pattern. The unique feature of the product is based on the principle that no two pieces are ever the same. The client is buying a hand-stitched piece of work designed and stitched by the designer Mclauchlan. Further personalised details can be added on request. The personalisation of the product further maximises product longevity. Craft and skill further maximise the value of the piece. The design collection for *The Cross* is a limited collection of six hand stitched, unique cushions, each sized 50cm x 50cm, inspired by Mclauchlan's love of colour and pattern. The time spent on each cushion is estimated at 14 hours. Materials used are 100% wool blanket, 100% cotton embroidery thread, 100% stranded 4ply and double knitting wool.



Figure 3: Personalised Sample Collection for The Cross, London, Shirley Mclauchlan, 2018.

Conclusions

Initial feedback during the *Futurescan 4: Valuing Practice* conference and exhibition was extremely positive. People were interested in the actual making of the pieces of work and in the design process. The recording of Mclauchlan's actual stitching combined with an insight into the design process to create unique pieces of textiles was of interest.

The film was selected by <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/europe/scotland/> to be screened during *Fashion Revolution Week* in April 2019 at the V&A Dundee as an example of good studio practice. This endorsement recognises Mclauchlan's contribution to that of being a sustainable designer. Since the initial screening, the film has been viewed over 300 times on YouTube.

Importance of hand stitching

Mclauchlan's business relies on designing and making unique hand stitched products. The nature of the work celebrates the skill and personal relationship between designer and client. This encourages the client to 'cherish' and value the work. The fact that there is never two items the same makes each piece unique with many pieces becoming family heirlooms.

Since 2000, sustainable design has been Mclauchlan's central design philosophy. The materials she uses are selected for their longevity and suitability for disassembly. All materials have had a first life and all surplus materials which are kept and reused. The work is made to last a long time and to be valued by the client.

Future work

Since making the film, Mclauchlan has gone onto work on #100daysprojectscotland2019. Each day she has hand stitched a pattern. The sample has been posted daily over the course of 100 days with some information on the location and the time the sample took to make. The documentation about the amount of time further documents the actual time a craft takes. Mclauchlan has recorded the 100 day project on both her Instagram @shirleymclauchlan and @100daysprojectscotland 2019, this further documents her collaboration with hand and digital technologies

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